

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 2099

Introduced by Assembly Member Mark Stone

February 17, 2016

An act to add Chapter 16 (commencing with Section 18997) to Part 6 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to public social services.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2099, as introduced, Mark Stone. Safe drinking water assistance program.

Existing law provides for financial and food assistance benefits to needy Californians, including, among other programs, the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program and CalFresh, under which each county provides for financial and food assistance benefits to qualified individuals who meet specified eligibility criteria. Existing law, administered by the State Department of Social Services, provides for the establishment of a statewide electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system for the purpose of providing those financial and food assistance benefits. Existing law authorizes a county to deliver CalFresh benefits and, upon election by the county, CalWORKs benefits through the use of an EBT system.

This bill would require the State Department of Social Services to establish and administer a safe drinking water assistance program to provide cash benefits to low-income households, as defined, with inadequate access to safe drinking water so that they may obtain safe drinking water. The bill would specify that eligible low-income households include, but are not limited to, households in a disadvantaged community, households eligible for interim emergency drinking water

benefits from the State Water Resources Control Board, and households whose private wells have gone dry or become contaminated, as specified. The bill would require that the program be funded with existing resources and would require the department, in consultation with other specified state agencies, to identify existing resources for the program. The bill would require the department to deliver the cash benefits through the EBT system. The bill would also make relating findings and declarations.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:
- 2 (a) The electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system is an electronic
- 3 system that has operated statewide in California since 2004 that
- 4 allows government benefits to be transferred directly to recipients,
- 5 similar to a bank debit card, to provide a way to spend benefits at
- 6 retailers.
- 7 (b) Research has shown that the use of EBT cards has many
- 8 advantages for delivering public benefits. For recipients, EBT
- 9 offers greater convenience, improved security, and reduced
- 10 stigmatization. For state governments, EBT provides cost and time
- 11 savings, improves operational efficiencies, and promotes
- 12 accountability while stimulating local economies.
- 13 (c) EBT has been deemed an effective and responsive
- 14 mechanism for quickly delivering assistance to people recovering
- 15 from natural disasters.
- 16 (d) The Legislature and the Governor established The Human
- 17 Right to Water in 2013, which established the policy of the state
- 18 that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and
- 19 accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and
- 20 sanitary purposes.
- 21 (e) Despite a history of proactive water policies, California
- 22 residents still face formidable challenges as the drought continues
- 23 to exacerbate water quality issues for disadvantaged communities
- 24 who disproportionately bear the health and financial impacts of
- 25 inadequate access to safe water.

1 (f) Significant barriers to water access exist for marginalized
2 Californians who are forced to choose between drinking water and
3 expending scarce resources to pay for clean water.

4 (g) In 2014, more than 1 million Californians faced water safety
5 violations that made water unsafe to drink.

6 (h) As the drought enters its fifth year, more than 2,000 domestic
7 wells have gone dry in the Central Valley, affecting tens of
8 thousands of people. Many small communities face chronic water
9 quality problems. Almost 400 small rural water systems and
10 schools are unable to provide safe drinking water.

11 (i) In response to these challenges, the Governor and the
12 Legislature have established or proposed new emergency drinking
13 water supports to assist these households.

14 (j) Recognizing this, it is the intent of the Legislature to utilize
15 the existing EBT system to deliver appropriate emergency water
16 benefits to disadvantaged households in an efficient and effective
17 manner.

18 SEC. 2. Chapter 16 (commencing with Section 18997) is added
19 to Part 6 of Division 9 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, to
20 read:

21
22 CHAPTER 16. SAFE DRINKING WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
23

24 18997. The State Department of Social Services shall establish
25 and administer a safe drinking water assistance program to provide
26 cash benefits to low-income households with inadequate access
27 to safe drinking water so that they may obtain safe drinking water.
28 Low-income households eligible for program benefits include, but
29 are not limited to, all of the following:

30 (a) Households in disadvantaged communities, as defined in
31 Section 79505.5 of the Water Code.

32 (b) Households eligible for interim emergency drinking water
33 benefits under the State Water Resources Control Board.

34 (c) Households whose private wells have gone dry or become
35 contaminated, as determined by the State Water Resources Control
36 Board.

37 18997.5. (a) To the extent allowable under federal law, the
38 department shall deliver the cash benefits provided pursuant to
39 this chapter through the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system
40 created under Section 10072. The distribution of the cash benefits

1 shall comply with any federal laws and regulations governing
2 electronic benefits.

3 (b) The program shall comply with privacy and confidentiality
4 procedures consistent with all applicable state and federal law.

5 18998. The program shall be funded from existing resources.
6 The department shall, in consultation with the Office of Emergency
7 Services, the Department of Water Resources, the State Water
8 Resources Control Board, and other relevant agencies, identify
9 existing resources for the program.

10 18998.5. For the purpose of this chapter, “low-income
11 household” means a household with income that is equal to or no
12 greater than 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline level. For
13 a one-person household, program eligibility shall be based on
14 two-person household guideline levels.